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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 4794
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9970
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

All media reported (lead stories in the three main Hebrew-language stories) that the chief military rabbi, Brig. Gen. Avihai Ronsky, began deliberations yesterday on whether the soldiers kidnapped at the onset of the Second Lebanon War, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad

Regev, can be declared killed in action. He will make a decision based on intelligence information and Jewish law. Ha'aretz quoted sources close to the talks with Hizbullah over a deal to release the two soldiers as saying that this move means the deal is off. The soldiers' families lashed out against the move and demanded that PM Ehud Olmert quickly bring the prisoner exchange deal to a cabinet vote.

Israel Radio cited remarks made by Olmert to the London-based Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat: He said that he has not yet decided whether to submit his candidature if an early election is held. Olmert noted that his predecessors as prime minister, Sharon, Barak and Netanyahu, were also investigated on suspicion of corruption, and he did not rule out the possibility that he was being targeted as a result of his activity on the diplomatic front. On the tahdiya agreement, Olmert said that if the smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip continues, this will be regarded as a violation and Israel will have to renew strikes against the terrorist organizations. Olmert said that concentrated negotiations are being conducted now for the release of Gilad Shalit, and that more time is needed for the negotiations on the issue of Regev and Goldwasser, which has not yet reached its conclusion. On the IAF exercise in Greece, Olmert said there are preparations by the IDF to meet the challenges facing Israel. He stressed that Israel cannot be inactive when a country that threatens to destroy it is arming itself with nuclear weapons. Olmert stressed, however, that Israel is doing everything in its power to persuade western countries to do everything possible to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

The media reported that the government coalition is expected to collapse tomorrow if the Labor Party votes to disband the Knesset, as it announced yesterday. PM Olmert has vowed to fire Labor ministers immediately after the vote, ending the ruling partnership between Kadima and Labor. Olmert's associates alleged that Labor leader and Defense Minister Ehud Barak is sabotaging moves of national importance (the truce deal with Hamas and Shalit's release) because of his own political interests. The media reported that yesterday Shas rejected Olmert's offer of benefits totaling 1.5 billion shekels (around \$445 million) in exchange for not voting in favor of the bill to disperse the Knesset. Ha'aretz reported that the balance of power indicates that the bill could pass by a majority of 70 MKs -- according to other dailies, 63 to 69 MKs -- making Shas the decisive vote.

All media reported that yesterday the High Court of Justice rejected the petition of Noam and Aviva Shalit against Olmert, the diplomatic-security cabinet, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and FM Tzipi Livni. At the same time, the justices noted they felt the cabinet needs to discuss again the issues surrounding the captivity of the Shalits' son, Gilad. Major media quoted former IDF chief of general staff Maj.-Gen. (res.) Moshe Ya'alon as saying yesterday in a comment that immediately elicited protests, in particular from Noam Shalit, that "in some situations we need to agree to make sacrifices in the face of what is demanded of us, because the price we would have to pay is far heavier than the price of losing a kidnapped soldier." He was referring to tentative prisoner exchange plans with Hizbullah and Hamas. The Jerusalem Post reported that Shalit's release is expected to be high on Olmert's agenda of talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh today.

The Jerusalem Post reported that top defense officials told the paper on Monday that "in a visit likely to fuel speculation about possible Israeli military action against Iran," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen will touch down briefly in Israel at the end of the week for talks with IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi. A few weeks after Mullen's visit, Ashkenazi will fly to Washington for several days on his first visit to the U.S. as chief of staff. The Jerusalem Post reported that U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead, who is currently in Israel on an official visit, told the daily yesterday that the U.S. military knew about the reported massive aerial exercise, and that questions about the reported exercise's intent should be directed to the IAF. Roughead was quoted as saying that Iran's naval conduct in the Persian Gulf is irresponsible and provocative.

The media quoted French President Nicolas Sarkozy as saying yesterday that there could be no Mideast peace unless Israel drops its refusal to cede sovereignty over parts of Jerusalem claimed by

the Palestinians. Speaking to a packed Knesset plenum at a special session in his honor, Sarkozy called on Israel to put an end to West Bank settlement. But he tempered his address by assuring Israel that it could count on France's support in halting Iran's nuclear program. Ha'aretz reported that Israel is following with interest the closer nuclear ties France is forging with the Arab world. The Foreign Ministry has declined to go on the record on the issue, but ministry officials say that though they are concerned about the matter, they do not oppose it. They say it is better for Israel that France is supplying nuclear technology to Arab countries and not less friendly nations such as Russia or China.

Electronic media reported that Islamic Jihad has proclaimed its intention to retaliate for the killing of an activist by the IDF in Nablus last night. A Hamas militant was also killed. Ha'aretz's web site reported that in the first such strike since a cease-fire went into effect in the Gaza Strip last week, Palestinian militants fired a mortar shell at the western Negev late last night. No injuries or damage were caused.

The Jerusalem Post reported that three years after Maj. Gen. (res.) Doron Almog was almost arrested in England for war crimes, the IDF has returned to sending senior officers to the UK for military studies.

Ha'aretz reported that French diplomats recently told their Israeli counterparts that the U.S. and France have agreed to try to lessen Syria's political isolation in the hope that this will undermine its ties with Iran. However, the daily quoted French sources as saying that the West's relations with Damascus are expected to remain strained as long as George Bush is U.S. president.

The Jerusalem Post printed a lengthy interview with Rep. Howard Berman, Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, a "Zionist at heart," quoting him as saying: "Israel's security and the U.S.-Israeli relationship is for me an issue that shapes my whole agenda [in] Congress, and guides it."

----- 1. Mideast: -----

Summary: -----

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The time has come to decide. Let the Prime Minister not turn Gilad Shalit into a sacrifice in vain."

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "How can [the government] not be ashamed to continue even at present to release spin after spin, packaged in a sanctimonious aura of phony patriotism?"

Block Quotes: -----

1. "A Moral Obligation"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (6/24): "Prime Minister Ehud Olmert should have one issue at the front of his mind when he meets today with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak: to bring kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit home. True, this is a difficult and frustrating negotiation. It is the country's prestige, not just that of the government and army, that hangs in the balance. The decision is being guided by considerations concerning Israel's security and the war against terror, the punishment of terrorists who murdered Israelis, and our attitude toward a terror group that stops at nothing to achieve its goals. The concern over letting prisoners go free who might return to terror is not a marginal one. However, from the moment the Israeli government decided to conduct indirect talks with Hamas and determined that it was willing to adopt criteria for swapping prisoners for Shalit, it understood there would be a price, and a high one, for his release.... It is best to realize now that any agreement Olmert reaches will not allay the feeling of anger that has welled up against the kidnappers and the groups in whose name they acted. No clause can represent Israel

as the victor in this arm-wrestling match. But we can recall painfully that even the major war Israel embarked on to liberate its two soldiers abducted to Lebanon led to no better an outcome. So the Prime Minister heads for Egypt to discharge the government's moral obligation to its civilians and soldiers -- to bring back a living captive before it is too late. The reasons for and against have already been fully discussed and the logic of the war against terror needs no more proof. The time has come to decide. Let the Prime Minister not turn Gilad Shalit into a sacrifice in vain."

II. "Merciless, Shameless"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (6/24): "How can they not be ashamed of themselves to let the families of the kidnapped soldiers wait like impoverished souls at the entrance to the corridors of power, begging them, the lords of the land, the deciders of fates, to please do something to put an end to our suffering? How can they not be ashamed to continue even at present to release spin after spin, packaged in a sanctimonious aura of phony patriotism? The day before yesterday they released the story about the hundreds of Palestinian prisoners that Israel is supposed to release as part of the Goldwasser and Regev deal. They tried to create the impression that Nasrallah had backed away from the agreements. That is completely false -- merely tricks in order to derail the deal. When that didn't work they moved on to Plan B yesterday and launched the 'rabbi campaign.' Now they are using the chief military chaplain to bury this story beneath the seal of 'presumed dead,' so that it is stricken from the public agenda.... The elections have driven these people mad.... No information that comes from the political echelon about the captives and MIAs is credible. It is all skewed by interests.... After two years the [abducted soldiers'] parents realized that the problem did not lie solely on Nasrallah and Mashal's side of the divide, but that it lay first and foremost on our side. They realized that their acceptance of the promises made by members of the 'establishment' was total and naive.... In order for us to understand just how much faith we can put in these people, yesterday the Prime Minister charged that his Defense Minister pressed to agree to the 'tahdiya' for political reasons (!!!). Now go figure: Is that information or spin? If it's information, the Defense Minister needs to be prosecuted for breach of duty. If it's all spin from the Prime Minister's Bureau then we're dealing with someone who has completely lost his bearings. So enough, stop. We deserve a more serious administration."

12. Iran:

Summary:

The ultra-Orthodox Yated Ne'eman editorialized: "All the debates [about a possible Israeli attack on Iran] and the headlines they are making constitute a 'self-fulfilling prophesy' and discuss 'war,' which their arrogance might provoke."

Block Quotes:

"Playing with Fire"

The ultra-Orthodox Yated Ne'eman editorialized (6/24): "It can be assumed that those behind the deliberate leak to the U.S. newspaper The New York Times regarding large-scale military maneuvers conducted by Israel as part of preparations for an attack on Iran, meant to convey a deterrent message and show the seriousness of Israel's intentions concerning the prevention of the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.... 'Wars of words' and 'offensives of messages' elicit question-marks. Indeed, all the ways to thwart the danger must be taken, but publications, provocative shows of force, and statements to that effect, are useless. From the diplomatic and security points of view, those publications conceal potential and covert risks.... All the debates and the headlines they are making constitute a 'self-fulfilling prophesy' and discuss 'war,' which their arrogance might provoke."